

Baptism of the Lord (C)

January 10, 2010

Baptism by FIRE has always intrigued me.

I'm sure all of us can recall at least one instance when we might have experienced "baptism by fire."

By saying "baptism by fire," I mean a time or two when we might have been thrown into a situation when we weren't completely prepared or ready.

For instance, a person may experience "baptism by fire" when he or she is asked to give a presentation at work at the last minute.

Or perhaps, a person may experience "baptism by fire" when he or she starts a new job without receiving the proper training or orientation.

Parents might experience "baptism by fire" when they have a baby for the first time...and/or second and third time...and realize there's no "How to" book.

I experienced "baptism by fire" a few times myself.

One instance that sticks out for me happened a few years ago on my internship as a seminarian right here in the school.

My supervisor, and the pastor at the time, decided to help me teach a religion class.

He told me we would "team teach," which I understood as both of us standing up in the front of the room teaching the material to the students.

Well, once we got into the classroom, I started talking about the material and before I knew it, I watched as my supervisor, and pastor, walked slowly towards the back of the classroom and sat down next to the teacher.

All of a sudden, I was alone in the front of the room teaching my very first time religion class to a classroom full of students.

I was prepared with the material, but not prepared to be teaching it alone for my first time.

And when this certain priest sat down in the back of the class, I truly felt as if I had been immediately thrown into teaching and thus, baptized by fire.

In the end, it all worked out fine and I did end up thanking this particular priest for helping me experience teaching...whether I was ready or not.

In our Gospel today, John mentions that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The fire that is mentioned though is that fire of the cross.

Christ's cross and crucifixion is "baptism by fire."

He was, in a sense, thrown into it.

And even though he did accept the cross, he probably would have preferred a different way to save humanity.

But, because he was obedient to the Father's will, he accepted the fact that he must die to save us...and that's exactly what he did.

And by doing so, he led by example.

Jesus was not ready, and never did, ask us to do anything that he would not do himself.

Picking up his cross was just one example.

Being baptized by water and the Holy Spirit is another.

Through his baptism by water and the Holy Spirit, Christ shows us a few things.

First, he reveals that those faithful who are baptized are consecrated by the power of the Blessed Trinity.

In other words, they are chosen, hand-picked by God, to be set apart for something great, something special, namely, everlasting life.

And that's exactly our reward through being baptized.

We receive the free gift of eternal life in the heavenly kingdom... something that was out of our reach before due to Original Sin.

But, because of Jesus' selfless act of giving his life for us and his resurrection, our being baptized restores this gift and we are made whole with God once again.

What an awesome reward this is...and it is by no merit of our own.

We have done nothing to earn this reward...yet, God, in His infinite mercy, love, and kindness, freely offers it to us.

Our only duty is to respond by accepting it.

Secondly, Jesus' baptism reveals to us the significance of prayer.

After Jesus was baptized, he prayed and by doing so, he teaches us the need and importance for us to pray after our own baptism.

Sin is always present in our lives.

And because it is, we need to be constantly praying for the grace and the strength to not only resist the temptation to sin, but also to thank God for His abundant blessings and gifts He has bestowed upon us.

And if nothing else, we need to pray because Jesus prayed throughout his life and to truly reflect Christ to those we encounter in the world, we need to get down on our knees every day.

May we learn something from all this, namely, to follow Jesus who was not afraid to lead by example...and the life he led was that of being baptized by the Holy Spirit and by fire and through such a baptism, we receive the free gift of everlasting life in the heavenly kingdom.